

Sermon by Jerry Howe on March 10th, 2019

Luke 4: 1-13

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

These lines are instantly recognized by us from the Lord's prayer. A prayer that we say every Sunday and possibly other times during the week depending on how we pray and when we pray and what we pray for.

Whether it is in reference to Jesus's 40 days in the desert and the temptation of the Devil I am not certain. And I haven't had time to really check.

Here we are at the beginning of the Lenten Season. Where we are supposed to find our own personal wilderness to find our ways to be like Jesus in today's

Gospel and allow ourselves to become full of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that is to lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

But it in my life it feels like the wilderness has become more and more difficult to find.

Many of our deserts have become havens for snow birds to escape the harshness of winter. And in some ways have become full of temptation. And I don't just mean Las Vegas.

One may say that you could go and commune with nature in various hiking trails in the area. But none of these represent the true sense depravation of the

journey that the Lord is taking in his 40 day walk about in the wilderness.

I struggled with the shadow sides of temptation and evil. Which clouded my judgement. I had a friend who survived the Holocaust by being hidden in the home of a family in a town near the Russian front. A horse had broken loose from the front and had come running into the neighborhood. A shot rang out. The horse dropped and within seconds it was butchered, and the meat parceled out evenly amongst the families. Food had been scarce. He said it was difficult for him to eat it at first but then his hunger took over and he devoured it.

Now in the strict sense this may have been evil. This horse was not the property of any one in the area. They truly had no right to shot it and butcher it. What was the

temptation and what was the evil in this situation? Our Lord in today's Gospel had no shelter or food for forty days. Similar to the situation of this village. Yet he refused the Devil.

As one of my more Evangelical friends told me I was taking a universal approach to temptation and evil something his Evangelical brethren would never take.

So as most of you know I have an awful habit of not writing my sermons to the eleventh hour. This one is absolutely no different and almost worse as one my best friends is in town visiting from the desert of Phoenix.

But here is what happened. Yesterday morning I awoke a bit early. Addicted to my phone I checked to see what I

had missed overnight and what may need to be done. And then I promptly fell back to sleep and had a dream. One of those that felt very real.

I was not clear of what transgression I had committed but had been summarily excommunicated and shunned by everyone at New Song and I mean everyone. Backs turned, no clear understanding of what I had said or done to deserve this. No one spoke to me. It was the worst feeling of my life. I had, in the eyes of the leaders and the whole congregation not treated a marginalized person very well or at least that is what it felt like. But even then, the transgression felt minor. I was terrified. Where will I go from here? Who will take me in spiritually? What could or should my penance be? Did the Devil make me do it? Had I truly been that evil? How would I ever regain the trust of you that I have grown to

love and respect and at times peacefully or nearly peacefully disagree with?

And as dreams go, of course I wasn't wearing any pants and I couldn't find any to put on as I was ushered out the front door of New Song for the very last time. I cannot describe the absolute desolation and feeling of being in a wilderness that I felt at that moment.

And then a voice said to me do not sleep walk thru your forty days of Lent. This is what you are to preach about. Then also, as dreams go, I slowly moved to that semi lucid stage. Realized I wasn't sitting back in the second-row up from the piano with no pants on. I was still in my pajamas and in the warmth of my bed. And the first message I received on my phone was from a friend who is a pastor of a church saying he was using something I

had posted on FB as a basis for his sermon today. And I sent back I have one to top that.

I feel like, the world now, is in so much turmoil over what is temptation and what is evil that I must take a universal approach to not continue to sleep walk thru lent.

Especially when so many religious leaders feel that that the LGBT community is the devil and gives them right to shun us for the evil we have committed. From the recent Methodist decision and our Methodist Brethren within our own community who this will so negatively impact. To a Catholic school in Kansas that is not allowing a kindergartener to enter the school since it is a child of a same sex couple. Who's the Devil and what is the evil? It doesn't me sad it makes me mad as hell.

From the rampant increase in hate related crimes and attacks against people of all races and creeds. To my friend who survived the holocaust by eating horse flesh. To the remaining holocaust survivors who are now speaking out once again in fear of what they are seeing happening. Not on like what they saw happen during WWII. All by people who feel that the have the righteousness to do so. What to you do to combat that? Is there any number of programs and speakers that can even begin to make a difference in what they think or believe?

And the President of the United States of America autographing Bibles to give to tornado victims. My home town survived a tornado, bibles were the last thing we needed. Does he think he is the next prophet of the

Christian Church and if so, do I still want to be a Christian?

Sometimes doesn't church make you feel like you are in the wilderness!

But in my anger and frustration I hear the voice from my dream say to me again in capital letters DO NOT SLEEP WALK THRU THIS SEASON OF LENT.

And spirit reminds me that the Lord did forty harsh days in true wilderness going without, not as a God, but as a human being not much different than you. He had temptation and the Devil offering him an easier path than the one he had committed to. And the desert experience was not even the beginning of what was yet

to come. Which was his death on the cross. A death for all, for the forgiveness of sins and the reopening of the gates of heaven, that all should have a life everlasting. And yet he didn't succumb to the tempting of the Devil he did not deviated from what he was ordained to do. His love for you Jerry was so great and not just you but for all mankind. And I feel spirit saying to me to be sure and emphasize ALL MANKIND. But is your love Jerry, for Jesus, not enough to keep you from taking an easier path?

You a do not need to be a prophet. You most definitely are not a messiah. But you also are not allowed to sleep walk thru the what you may perceive to be the wilderness of organized religion either. Your one small voice may make a difference to only one person but use it. In your daily devotions when you pray," Worship the

Lord your God and serve only him” be sure to ask him how best to serve him that day. And be sure to listen and be sure to take the action required. Lenten devotion without action means you are sleeping walking thru your faith.

And when it is said that “Do not put the lord your God to the test.” But you are feeling tested. Ask the Lord to help you through to a better understanding of not why me but how best can I learn to serve you my Lord from this experience. Not on like those holocaust survivors who are speaking out about their experience of hate from so long ago so as not to be forgotten. But to sound the alarm to not allow it to happen again.

And when it is said that, “One does not live by bread alone.” But you are feeling spiritually famished pray to

the Holy Spirit to guide you to sustenance. It may be a feeling of a problem being lifted from you. The overwhelming sudden sense of peace surrounding you. Or a message in a dream. Do not sleep walk thru this season of Lent. I believe in the message of love and peace, but I also recall from my Catholic confirmation being called to be Soldiers for Christ. Stand tall and stand firm in your convictions of what justice in the name of God truly is and means. Learn how to fight the good fight. Do not allow others to place you in an unjust wilderness of church or organized religion. Reclaim what you truly believe is God's call to service for all humanity.

So today when we reach the Lord's Prayer I pray that the Holy Spirit fills each of you with a renewed energy and spirit. And that you support me in my Lenten journey.

And that this sermon doesn't get me excommunicated. I still have my pants on at least.

And all of God's Children say,

Amen